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DISCUSSION
A HOUSING PROGRAM
BY LAWRENCE VEILLER
MR. ROBERT W. DEFOREST presiding
Saturday, June 3, at 3 o'clock

THE PRESIDENT:

I am glad to notice that Mr. Veiller did not read a paper. What he said is open to discussion, and the first gentleman to be called upon is Mr. John M. Glenn, Director of the Russell Sage Foundation.

MR. GLENN:

I come from a city which Mr. Veiller has been accusing, Baltimore. There cesspools have unquestionably been a great nuisance. While in Baltimore most of the houses are only two stories in height with plenty of light and air, the cesspools are everywhere. Fortunately the fine new sewage system will soon supplant them. But Baltimore's experience is a warning to other smaller cities to prevent at once the growth of this evil.

There is in Baltimore another evil which is little recognized, namely, the crowding of several families into old houses originally meant for a single well-to-do family. They are too large for one family of laboring people and have been utilized to house from three to seven or eight families. The resulting conditions are as bad as anything that exists in the city of New York or anywhere else. In St. Louis similar conditions exist.

St. Louis took a tremendous jump at one time, and many people moved from the central part of the city out toward the western part near the park. It looked as if the intermediate houses which were left by the well-to-do were becoming overcrowded by poor people, and as if bad conditions would result if something was not done. This is a very difficult thing to stop, because it cannot be easily remedied by legislation.

Two things are vital to the carrying out of a housing pro-

gram: first, knowledge of conditions; second, enforcement of legislation. The reason we have bad housing conditions, as a rule, is that people do not know what is going on outside of their own immediate neighborhood; often they do not even know what is happening near them. Some of the most serious housing problems in Baltimore arise from the alleys which are just back of some of the wealthiest people's houses. They do not realize that while unhealthy conditions exist in their neighborhood they are just as much in danger as the individual who is directly affected; that filth and disease are sources of danger not only to the people living in bad houses, but also to their neighbors, and to the whole community; there is danger, for instance, of the spreading of disease by flies and mosquitoes, or by the contact of one set of children with another set, both on the streets and in the public schools. People do not try to know what is going on immediately around them, still less do they consider conditions in other parts of the city.

The first thing, therefore, in starting a city-planning program is to find out what the conditions are; the next most vital thing is the enforcement of the provisions of the building and sanitary codes. We in America have tremendous faith, in this age, in legislation. We believe when we put a law on the statute-book that we have done a fine thing. As a matter of fact that is only a preliminary step. We have many laws on the statute-books which would be good if they were enforced, but they are not enforced; they are a dead letter, because the city authorities and those who should force the city authorities to do what is necessary are not willing to spend the necessary money. They are not willing, for instance, to have sufficient housing and sanitary inspectors. That is one of the greatest lessons we have to learn in America, that laws do not enforce themselves nor do they arouse public opinion; on the contrary, they very often quiet it, and lessen the general vigilance.

The enforcement of laws is economical, not wasteful. It results first in curing and reducing the evils, and second, in giving us the knowledge necessary as a foundation for preventive and constructive work. The dissemination of facts about housing and health and the enforcement of laws can fairly be laid chiefly

on the municipalities. It is of prime importance to educate municipalities to take up their full share of the burden of freeing us from these flagrant evils.

Health boards, building commissions, and other public agencies are especially weak in gathering and spreading information. What Mr. Veiller and other agencies have been doing to educate their communities by getting before them the facts, ought to be done by every health board and every public commission in the country. I urge those who are here that in their respective cities they make every effort possible to induce public authorities to realize their opportunities as educators, as developers of publicity, and that they urge city councils and taxpayers to provide the means to make known conditions and remedies, as well as the means to enforce the laws.

THE PRESIDENT:

We shall now hear from Prof. Farnam, of Yale University, who needs no introduction to this audience.

PROFESSOR HENRY W. FARNAM, New Haven:

This program, as Mr. Veiller well said, ought to consider the causes of the housing problem. If we go a little further back we shall, I think, find that the fundamental economic cause is our great desire to build up our country, and, in particular, our cities, and that this leads us to stimulate a two-fold movement, first from foreign countries to the United States, and then from the rural districts to the cities. In other words, in most of our modern cities the housing evils are those which arise out of migration.

Mr. Veiller spoke of selecting tenants, but of course if the landlord selects his tenants, and if all landlords take only those tenants that are desirable, there will be a certain number left over, who must be either deported or in some other way disposed of, so that his idea of selection, which I think is an admirable one, should, it seems to me, apply not only to the landlord, but to the country as a whole. In other words, we have before us really this great problem of securing the labor force which we absolutely need, without at the same

time developing the sanitary and other evils which we all recognize. No intelligent stock-breeder, for instance, would import a lot of Guernsey cattle unless he had a stable in which to house them, and yet we urge human beings to come over without making any adequate provision for taking care of them when they arrive.

In the early days of this country you will find that the settlers, especially in New England, took great pains to provide in advance a regular system of settlement. In New Haven the town plot was laid out in nine squares, and certain lots were assigned for public purposes, and other lots were assigned to individual settlers for dwelling, for farming, *etc.* If we recall the lessons which our ancestors taught us, we realize that this housing-reform movement is merely a revival and an adaptation to modern conditions of some of those wise lessons.

I agree with Mr. Veiller in thinking that it is not the greed of landlords which is predominant; I think it is national greed, or, you may say, a disproportion between the national desire for wealth and an appreciation of the responsibilities which go with that *désire*, that is really at the root of this problem.

THE PRESIDENT:

This is an open forum, but necessarily I think we shall have to limit speakers to five minutes, unless there be some vote which extends their time.

MR. CHARLES H. SCHNELLE, United Real Estate Owners, New York City:

I have had thirty years' experience in handling taxpayers' property, from the lowest kind to the high-class apartment, and I want to give you a partial remedy. This is the age of arbitration. I have heard the word "legislation" so often this afternoon that it has really become tiresome. I have had quite a little to do with legislation, especially in the interest of real-estate owners, and I have just this to say on the subject. When the chairman addressed the meeting he said that there were representatives of chambers of commerce, charity organizations and various other bodies but not of real-estate owners.

Now, I believe that is where a great mistake is made, that these conferences are held without asking the coöperation of the men who are financially touched in this matter. These real-estate owners, these landlords, so-called, have their capital invested, but they are not all, as some of them are pictured to be, people who are trying to get everything out of the dollar that they can get. I class myself as one of those who do not try to get everything out of a poor soul. I will state that in my experience for thirty years I have never yet used the privilege of a dispossess to put out a family in the street. With consent of the owners, I have taken care of at least a dozen families whose rent was four, five or six months behind, not only because I felt that it was doing justice to those people who were in an unfortunate condition at the time, but also because I did not believe that any loss would result from it. I am taking care of some now. One person, even yesterday, paid me one dollar on account of six months' rent, for instance. Now, I am not doing that on my own responsibility, but I am trying to educate the owners and persuade them that it is in a good cause. Therefore I want to speak for the poor, down-trodden landlord. Do not believe that because a man owns a building he has no heart.

I represent, not officially this afternoon, but as a member, an association of real-estate owners, and I have always invited, and Mr. Veiller knows it, conferences with him. But your organizations have never yet asked for conferences with us, and I think that is unfair. It is easy, as some one stated here recently, to be charitable with other people's money. You jump from your association to the legislature, and never ask the owners, "Can't we get together?" I should think it would be a good idea in connection with your association to form a little get-together club. I think you will accomplish much more by getting some of the men that are really interested in the cause of getting good tenement properties, even if they have a cheap class, to get together with your people, rather than continually to pound and pound without giving them a chance to remedy the conditions which exist, except by going to the legislature.

That is wrong. I speak for one who is connected with various

philanthropic organizations, and I have come here this afternoon just to give you this advice. If you will follow it you will accomplish much more than by going to the legislature. Confer with real-estate owners, and I will assure you—I have quite a little influence with them—I assure you, if you have those talks with real-estate owners, and with other people who are financially interested, you have nothing to lose. Now you simply go to the legislature, forgetting that these men and women have their life income invested in this property. But if you had conferences with these people, especially those that have charity in them—there are a great many in New York city, even if they do own real estate, that have some charity in them—they will gladly assist in the organization that is trying to lift up the down-trodden. I trust that hereafter when these conferences are being held, the men and the women who are financially interested in these matters may be invited to take part. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT :

I am glad to have the real-estate owner speak. Mr. Schnelle is mistaken, however, if he supposes the real-estate owners are not invited and working here. We have on our program Mr. Adolph Bloch, representing the very people to whom he has referred. I know it, because I have been opposed to him as representing the United Real Estate Owners' Association. I am glad, too, that Mr. Schnelle spoke of the desirability of getting together. It is a doctrine which I practise, as he knows. We also have here present the largest owner of New York tenement property in this city, in the person of Dr. E. R. L. Gould, president of the City and Suburban Homes Company. I hope that the real-estate owners will feel that they are just as welcome here as anyone else. I have a personal feeling about that, because I am a real-estate owner myself. I will now call upon Mr. Bogen, of Cincinnati.

DR. BORIS D. BOGEN, Chairman Housing Committee, Social Workers Club, Cincinnati.

I come from a small town, or rather village, called Cincinnati,

and I was surprised to-day to learn a new cause of existing tenement conditions, namely, the immigrant. Judging by that, we ought to have no tenement-house situation of any consequence in Cincinnati, for our foreigners are very few and our immigration is very small.

In discussing this situation we ought to make up our minds first of all not to fear to tell the truth about it. I believe the tenement-house situation has an economic basis, and every city in the appropriate economic stage will have the same symptoms of economic deficiency. To blame the poor immigrant for coming before his house is built, or to blame the foreigner because he did not attend public school before coming to this country, is not a correct diagnosis of the situation. With all due respect to the speaker, I think it my duty to object to his statements. When I came to this country my house was not built, and I did not know how to live until I was given a chance.

MR. CHARLES B. BALL, Board of Health, Chicago:

I have been much interested in this question of ownership. There are those in this room who will remember the case of the man in New York city who very shortly after the passage of the law of 1901 sold three-quarters of a million dollars' worth of tenements in order to escape the operation of that law.

The greatest difficulty we have in Chicago is the lack of knowledge of landlords of what their property is like, and I am sure that is true as to many cities. But we have also the individual ownership of tenements by owners whose standards are very low. We can find thousands of houses on small lots where there are from three to eight families, usually in two houses, where the owner lives on the premises, and in the poorest apartment. It is almost impossible to raise the standards of such owners to correspond with those of the law. It is a tremendous difficulty.

One of the things we have to contend with in Chicago is that we have hundreds of families that depend upon water-closets under the front vaults. The tenants of a number of stories in a rear building have to come down to the ground and go underneath the front walk to get to a toilet. That is an evil lacking in New York.

I was quite struck with Mr. Glenn's statement that good laws quiet public opinion. There are many people that go to sleep just as soon as a law is passed. That is just the beginning. If every one were up and doing after a law had been passed we should make progress. The best example of that is a recent one in Chicago. We passed a law imposing the care of sanitation of street cars upon the sanitary bureau of the department of health. There are something more than 5000 street cars in Chicago, and it was impossible to get from our finance committee an appropriation for five inspectors, 1000 cars apiece, to clean up those street cars. The consequence is that we are constantly blamed for not enforcing that law, and we have not been enforcing it, but we can show that there is a good reason for failure. These points are well worth our attention.

MR. PAUL C. FEISS, Chairman Housing Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Cleveland:

It seems to me that in discussing a program we must define who "we" are. Although the speaker and those who have followed said that we must do this and we must do that, and that the city officials and that the city agencies have not been able to do it for lack of the appropriation of various moneys, I should like to ask, who is "we?" It seems to me that "we" in almost every case is the independent volunteer agency, whether it is a tenement-house commission connected with a chamber of commerce or some other society. Whatever form it takes, it is evidently a volunteer, unpaid agency, which may have a paid secretary.

This is an interesting thing which has come into being in our American cities, and is taking a very important place in city affairs. The difficulties that city officials are having, and the great number of impediments that are put in their way are obvious to anybody who has worked with them. It seems to me, therefore, that the first thing we should do is to get a well-regulated committee composed of men and women who are willing to give their time to the work unstintedly and with real enthusiasm. Such a committee has tremendous strength, and can perhaps better than a city official create opinion; it can

have tremendous power, because it is not affiliated with any political organization in guiding public opinion, and in assisting the city officials. I think that is the beginning; it is thence that the real impetus must come.

There is one other thing that I have not heard mentioned in connection with the growth of our cities, and that is the desire of cities to become bigger. We are speaking continually of getting "back to nature," and yet every city watches with great interest for the next census report, and looks toward the goal of a large number of inhabitants. Some time ago, at a meeting of a committee in our city, plans were discussed to increase industrial diversification, and also incidentally to bring more people to the city. I said that it was a great mistake, and that, although there should not be objection to any movement making the city of Cleveland larger, if it was a natural one, the growth should not be stimulated. One of the things we should do to-day in order to prevent housing evils is to keep our cities smaller. It may sound silly, but I think it is one of the things we ought to have in mind.

DR. W. H. FUCHS, Housing Committee, Civic League, St. Louis:

It has been correctly stated that every city has individual peculiarities regarding housing and sanitation problems. Maybe the factor of financial returns from tenement property is peculiar to St. Louis, although it would hardly be reasonable to suppose that we are unique in that respect. At any rate, property of this character is left in charge of real-estate agents whose success in this kind of business depends, not so much upon the maintenance of a proper physical or sanitary condition of the property in their charge, as upon the financial returns they are able to make for the owners of the property. This disregard, on their part, for a proper sanitary standard creates one of the most difficult problems with which we have to contend.

Only recently the Civic League committee made a trip through the city to inspect various sanitary—or rather unsanitary—conditions, such as back yards, privy vaults, school sinks, underground bakeries and dairies within the city limits, which demanded attention and proper regulation. We were astounded

at the atrocious state of affairs existing at some points. We have not the problem of many-storied tenements with rooms having no communication with the outer air, lack of light, *etc.*, as you have it in New York city, but we do have the problem of filthy back yards, privy vaults and school sinks, in a much more acute form than here.

There are three great difficulties in the way of a proper legislative remedy. The first is that we cannot make new legislation retroactive. It is comparatively easy to enact laws providing for the proper sanitary safeguards in the construction of new tenement property. The difficulty lies in overcoming united opposition to any laws the intent of which is to compel owners of old property to spend some of the income derived, so as to make it conform to the demands of modern sanitation.

The second is, that we cannot secure for the sanitary department of a municipality an appropriation in the annual budget sufficient for the employment of an adequate number of sanitary inspectors and other employes to carry out the provisions of legislative enactments. This difficulty exists particularly in St. Louis. This will be more thoroughly appreciated by you when I say that we have only the following members constituting the entire sanitary force of our city : one chief sanitary officer (assistant health commissioner) ; assistant chief sanitary officer; seven chief district inspectors; twenty-nine district inspectors; four store (shop) inspectors; four dairy inspectors; four meat inspectors; four posters of infectious-disease placards; one chief fumigator; one assistant chief fumigator; six fumigators; and seven assistant fumigators; a total of sixty-nine. The enormity of their task becomes more apparent when I tell you that we have a population of about 800,000; that our ratio of area to population is probably the largest of any city in the world; that we have nineteen miles of river-front to inspect; that during the past winter there were reported fifteen hundred cases of measles per month during several months, in all of which the houses had to be placarded, besides hundreds of cases of diphtheria and scarlet fever, in each instance of which thorough fumigation was done, lasting from two to four hours. One district, comprising considerable territory and a population

of about 140,000, was in the hands of only four sanitary inspectors.

The third difficulty, and the greatest of all, is the education of the public at large in the need of higher sanitary standards; and, more particularly, the teaching of the inhabitants of tenement districts better habits of life, the relationship of cleanliness and health and a proper regard for the comfort and happiness of their neighbors. In common with other large cities St. Louis has had an enormous influx of foreigners, chiefly Italians, Russian Jews and Hungarians. In the speaker's own experience he has seen one room, about 14 by 16 feet, housing twenty-two Italian laborers. They slept on filthy blankets on narrow shelves three tiers high arranged along the walls of the room. In another instance, in two rooms, each about 16 by 18 feet, were housed four couples and seventeen single men, all Hungarians. All but two of the inmates were regularly employed, and the wages earned were one dollar per day for the two women, and from \$1.25 to \$4.50 per day for the twenty-one men. These people are often not so much ignorant of sanitary laws as anxious to accumulate a competence, which is sent to their native country in instalments, to be followed by the individual when enough has been accumulated to enable him to live in comparative comfort.

But we are at work in St. Louis, and our aim is to create strong and sufficient public sentiment to ensure the enactment of sanitary regulations which will make our city the cleanest and most healthful in the world.

One other point deserves emphasis, and might be effectively used in our municipal campaign for sanitary reform. Every American has referred with great pride to the magnificent work accomplished by the sanitary division of the United States Army in the Philippines, Cuba and the Canal Zone. It should be easy to awaken a similar feeling and degree of pride in any citizen for the sanitary reform to be accomplished by his own municipality and to enlist his active support of measures directed to that end.

DR. EDWARD T. DEVINE, Secretary Charity Organization Society, New York City:

There is one point on which I find myself in disagreement with my comrade in arms, Mr. Veiller. I agree most emphatically with all that he put into his program, and with the emphasis which he put upon it. But the point upon which I do not find myself in agreement is as to the relation which he indicates between the housing movement and certain other things which he refers to as allied to it, and as touching it at one or two different points, but which, on the contrary, to me seem to be vital and integral parts of the movement itself. I refer to town planning, the control of transit facilities, and taxation. I am surprised that when town planning arises in Mr. Veiller's mind, he thinks of magnificent parkways and beautifully laid-out schemes for civic centers; and I have to say this, that if the people's minds run to esthetic considerations such as he has described, it is because the people who have their feet on the ground in reference to housing have not taken so much part as they should in town-planning conferences.

It seems to me that town planning should suggest to our minds the making of a definite city plan, with the control of factories and the distribution of factories in such a way as to influence the housing problem, the preparation of land for the provision of sewers and pavements and roads in advance of the needs of population in such a way as to influence directly the character and the location of the homes that the people are to occupy. In the same way I think our interest in rapid transit and in the development of our transportation facilities should take the form of influencing directly the distribution of population, and that the modification of our taxation system, by putting heavier burdens upon unoccupied land and lighter burdens, relatively, upon factories and dwellings, should have the social and economic purpose of influencing the kind of homes that the people shall have, the location of those homes and the rents that they shall pay for them. Those things seem to me to be vitally and integrally related, and not merely incidentally related to the housing problem.